



**U.S. Immigration
and Customs
Enforcement**

News Release

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ICE SEIZES FAKE CHILDREN'S TRADING CARDS WORTH MILLIONS

LOS ANGELES – U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents executed a search warrant late last week at a Los Angeles area warehouse and seized what industry representatives say is the largest cache of counterfeit Yu-Gi-Oh! trading cards ever recovered.

Officials at the Carlsbad regional office of Upper Deck, the company licensed to distribute the popular trading card game, say the cards seized during Wednesday's operation would retail for almost \$3 million if they were genuine.

The bulk of the counterfeit game cards were discovered at a warehouse in Vernon where a company called J.S.K. International rented space. ICE obtained a search warrant for the warehouse after a vendor in downtown Los Angeles offered to sell an ICE undercover agent 250 cartons of the counterfeit cards for more than \$36,000. The vendor told the ICE agent he could pick up the merchandise at a warehouse at 1566 Rio Vista Avenue. Inside the warehouse, ICE agents found approximately 350 cases of the counterfeit trading cards.

"What makes this case so compelling is that the potential victims were children," said Steve Lovett, the supervisory special agent who oversees ICE's trade fraud unit in Los Angeles. "Beyond that, the profits from the sale of counterfeit merchandise worldwide often go to support other types of criminal enterprise. That is why ICE is committed to working aggressively with private industry to dismantle these schemes."

So far, no arrests have been made in the card counterfeiting scheme, but the investigation is ongoing. ICE agents believe the bogus cards were manufactured in China. The initial lead in the probe came from investigators working for Yu-Gi-Oh!'s trademark holder, Upper Deck.

According to industry representatives, Yu-Gi-Oh! is the top-rated trading card game in the country, accounting for billions of dollars in annual retail sales worldwide. The object of the Yu-Gi-Oh! game is to win a Match by reducing an opponent's "points" from 8,000 to zero. This is accomplished through a series of turns using a deck with a minimum of 40 cards and a combination of strategy, skill, and luck.

“This seizure is part of our ongoing effort to rid the global marketplace of counterfeiting, which hurts consumers and retailers alike,” said Sharon Hannis, with Upper Deck’s fraud investigation team. “Not only is Upper Deck working with government agencies worldwide to protect the integrity of our name and brands, we are also partnering with consumers to identify those who illegally manufacture and distribute fake products.”

The Yu-Gi-Oh! franchise is based on the Yu-Gi-Oh!™ comic series from artist Kazuki Takahashi that first appeared in Japan in 1996. Yu-Gi-Oh!™ follows the adventures of Yugi, a young boy who possesses the “Millennium Puzzle” that allows him to transform into the “Game King” whenever he is challenged.

Editor’s Note: Samples of the seized merchandise will be on display at ICE’s Long Beach Office – 501 W. Ocean Boulevard – from 2:00 to 3:00 p.m. this afternoon. Call (562) 624-3800 when you arrive at the building. Parking is available in the public garage located at Ocean and Magnolia. If you are unable to attend, digital photos of the seized items are also available. Contact ICE public affairs for more information.

ICE

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement was established in March 2003 as the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. ICE is comprised of five integrated divisions that form a 21st century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key homeland security priorities.